of handicapped persons & (vii) "May I Help You" Booth, to physically disabled persons. In the first instance all identified facilities have been provided to all 'A' category stations. Now railway has planned to provide these facilities at all 'B' category stations. Railways have also started providing second-class guard-cum-luggage (SLR) type coaches with disabled friendly features. These coaches have (i) wider doors than normal coaches to enable the disabled passenger to enter the coach while seated on the wheel chair, (ii) toilets which have been designed with sufficient space for a wheel chair borne passenger and (iii) wider passage in the corridor to allow for movement of wheel chair.

Manamadurai-Rameswarm and Manamadurai-Trichy stretch

1942. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) the probable date of completion of Manamadurai-Rameswarm stretch on the one side and Trichy-Manamadurai stretch on the other which are long overdue;

(b) how the railway lines are proposed to cross across the sea between Pamban and Rameswarm; and

(c) whether there will be a new bridge across the sea or the existing Pamban bridge will be widened, modernized and strengthened for this purpose subject to technical stability and feasibility?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) to (c) On Madurai-Rameshwarm (161 kms) gauge conversion project, Madurai-Manamadurai (48 kms) section has already been completed and work on Manamadurai-Mandapam section is targeted for completion during 2005-06. Line between Mandapam and Rameswarm is proposed to be converted to broad gauge. However, no time frame has been fixed for conversion of this section.

The existing bridge at Pamban between Mandapam and Rameswarm will be retained duly replacing/strengthening the existing Metre Gauge girders to suit Broad Gauge standard including Scherzer span.

On Tiruchchirappalli-Manamadurai (150 kms) gauge conversion project, work on Tiruchchirappalli-Pudukottai (52 kms) section is targeted for

completion during 2005-06 and the remaining section will be completed in the coming years as per availability of resources.

Effect on rail network due to climatic change

1943. SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether climatic changes over the next 30 to 50 years would affect the rail network in the country;

(b) whether sea between Kochi and Mumbai is rising thus increasing the repair and maintenance cost of the rail project;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) Governments' plans to rectify the situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) to (d) Normally climatic changes over the subcontiment in time scale of 30 to 50 years are not likely to effect the rail network to any significant level. There have been no variations observed in repair and maintenance costs of rail projects which can be related to any change in sea level on western coast. Some recently reported studies have predicted that temperatures could rise by 3 to 4° Celsius, sea level could rise in southern penisular India and monsoon rains could witness 10 to 30% increase by end of 21st century. However these studies are indicative only at this stage. Construction and Maintenance practices will adapt to the situations arising over the time.

Japanese loan for dedicated freight corridor project

1944. SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Japanese offer of a cheap loan to Railways much hyped dedicated freight corridor project has not been seriously considered by Railways;

(b) whether loan was offered at an interest rate of 0.45 per cent but with a condition that Railways would source 30 per cent of equipment required from Japan;